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Review of MENC Handbook of Research on Music Learning (vols. 1 & 2), Oxford University Press, 2011, edited by Richard Colwell and Peter Webster.

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Music educators and researchers regularly seek new ideas and current information about effective teaching and learning at all levels of instruction. The vast quantity of completed studies, and the time required to review, edit, and publish them, often puts readers at a disadvantage when trying to collect and organize current, relevant literature on a given topic. The *MENC Handbook of Research on Music Learning* provides excellent syntheses of the most recent research on multiple topics with “a laserlike focus on what is at present known about *learning* [italics added for emphasis] in music” (p. v).

This handbook provides a thorough, critical examination of the literature surrounding key topics in music education, suggests potential applications to music classes and rehearsals, and offers thoughtful suggestions for further studies along each line of research discussed. Researchers, professors, teachers, and graduate students will appreciate the depth of content, carefully and thoughtfully placed in current social, cultural, and educational contexts.

The book is split into two volumes: *Volume 1, Strategies*; and *Volume 2, Applications*. The first volume focuses on factors affecting readiness to learn and the learning process in general, while the second volume highlights particular applications of research in typical music learning situations. Each chapter in both volumes represents the expert work of a particular contributing author or authors on that topic. Overall, the writing style of all authors is excellent; they provide depth and breadth of information in an accessible style, and include any background information necessary to assure understanding of their work.

Volume 1: Strategies

In the opening chapter, “How Learning Theories Shape Our Understanding of Music Learners,” Susan O’Neill and Yaroslav Senyshyn provide an overview of the role of learning theories in music education through four perspectives: behaviorism, constructivism, pragmatism, and existentialism. This chapter defines and clarifies key terms, outlines important considerations when developing and analyzing learning theories, and details applications of each perspective to music learning. It also serves as an appropriate point of departure for the rest of the handbook. Peter Webster, in “Construction of Music Learning,” sets up a very important premise for the entire chapter: a primary focus on the *learner* in education. His discussion of the place of constructivism in the music classroom is crafted carefully, encompassing diverse opinions and perspectives from the literature, and presenting strengths and weaknesses in various applications. As do most of the authors in these volumes, Webster complements his thorough review of relevant literature with specific suggestions for in-service teachers and for researchers pursuing this line of inquiry.

Richard Colwell discusses “Roles of Direct Instruction, Critical Thinking, and Transfer in the Design of Curriculum for Music Learning.” A particular strength of this chapter is the historical context he provides through a critical examination of movements in general education and arts education in the United States. In his outline of important considerations for curriculum development, Colwell strikes an appropriate balance of describing parallels to other educational

disciplines, while also highlighting unique characteristics specific to *musical* teaching and learning.

Keith Swanwick's "Musical Development" is a great example of what many of the authors in this handbook have accomplished: acknowledging the difficulty inherent in searching for truth about music education in an increasingly multicultural and multimusical educational arena, and outlining how researchers have (or have not) taken this into consideration in their work. Swanwick provides a general framework for evaluating a theory, and then critically examines his own theory, leaving readers with an invaluable insider's perspective.

Steven Demorest, in "Biological and Environmental Factors in Music Cognition and Learning" frames the chapter around a longstanding topic of music learning: nature versus nurture. Demorest provides important perspectives from recent developments in neuroscientific research, acknowledges that those findings do not easily or automatically lend themselves to classroom applications, and proceeds to skillfully guide the reader through building some of those very bridges. Demorest, like Swanwick, takes into account the importance of cross-cultural considerations when discussing nature versus nature.

In "Motivation and Achievement," Lisa Linnenbrink-Garcia, Martin Maehr, and Paul Pintrich frame their discussion on four central characteristics of student motivation (choice and preference, intensity, persistence, and quality of engagement), and help the reader to understand, through the literature, how these apply to musical tasks. They provide a thorough discussion of prevalent theories of motivation in education, and outline five future directions to be pursued by researchers and educators interested in the role of motivation in the music classroom.

Bret Smith, in "Motivation to Learn Music," provides an important complementary contrast to Webster's focus on the learner, by outlining the importance of the *teacher* on the motivation of music students. Through relevant research findings, he puts forth a consistent plea to in-service teachers to be aware of the influence of their actions and words on students' musical and personal growth. Smith notes how influential a student's motivation is to that student's growth, and emphasizes that a thorough understanding of factors affecting student motivation is crucial in cultivating that growth.

Volume 2: Applications

Rob Dunn, in "Contemporary Research on Music Listening," describes in detail the myriad factors affecting musical listening, including researcher and teacher interference during research studies. He provides a succinct and helpful outline of measurement types and experimental designs used to gauge listening experiences across various populations. Dunn's report and discussion address important current topics: listening by musicians and "non-musicians," listening during school and outside of school, teachers' roles in students' listening experiences, and perceived "validity" of various approaches to musical listening. He tackles the

question of *why* people listen to music, providing some answers from the literature, and prompting additional investigations.

In “The Acquisition of Music Reading Skills,” Donald Hodges and Brett Nolker note large gaps in the literature on music reading skill development, and urge readers to consider their ample recommendations for further study. They warn that much of the literature on music reading is outdated, and therefore mostly irrelevant. The authors caution against hasty transfers from results of language reading research, noting inherent differences between language reading and music reading, and asserting that language reading research is much more exhaustive and solidly grounded in established theories. They suggest, therefore, that music reading researchers take study design cues from language reading researchers, and that they continue to incorporate into their work the latest technology available.

Carlos Abril, in “Music, Movement, and Learning,” provides a helpful context by outlining the history of the role of movement in American music education over the course of the last century. He takes a logical approach to the general discussion of movement in music learning by first reporting on studies of natural tendencies of human beings—evidenced through studies of music and movement in very early childhood— followed by an in-depth analysis of factors affecting movement and music learning later in formal and informal settings. His review of literature is particularly commendable for providing a fair and honest critique of study designs and procedures presented, and placing the results and conclusions into context for the reader. Abril notes the predominance of studies focused on young children in formal learning situations, and suggests the need for more movement research across age groups and cultures.

In “Self-Regulation of Musical Learning,” Gary McPherson and Barry Zimmerman note the paucity of studies on this topic, especially with school-age children. They include reports of professional, expert musicians’ self-regulatory habits in practice and performance, but warn the reader of differences between the musical lives of adults and children. They also include studies on self-regulation from other disciplines, but emphasize that music performance studies encompass unique learning experiences, generally much different than any other field. The authors’ review of literature and discussion of music students focuses mostly on instrumentalists, exploring the transition from parents’ and teachers’ regulation of students’ musical growth to gradual self-regulation of that growth.

Kenneth Phillips and Sandra Doneski begin “Research on Elementary and Secondary Singing” with a compelling statement: “Perhaps the most basic question is why the music education profession has been unsuccessful in producing a society that can sing” (p. 176). The authors do not attempt to report research from across cultures, but wisely focus on elementary and secondary school singing in only the United States. Their review exhibits a particularly strong and clear organization according to age and grade level, quite helpful to those researching or teaching any of various grade levels, and especially to those interested in key transition periods along young singers’ development. The authors are careful to point out subtopics of singing research that have been carried out with one age group, but are sorely lacking with another. In their discussion of research on solo singing and group singing, they necessarily include important findings about teachers of singing. This valuable information for inservice teachers is

an extra benefit not necessarily evident in the chapter's title. The chapter closes with a litany of well-constructed, relevant, provocative research questions for future inquiry.

In "Music Learning in Special Education," Elise Sobol focuses on autism and developmental disabilities. At the beginning of the chapter, she orients the reader with helpful definitions and a brief history of special education in the United States. Although less extensive than the other chapters, this one nevertheless focuses on important connections to research in the broader field of special education, and provides helpful perspectives for practitioners and researchers alike. Sobol emphasizes the need to bring together researchers and practitioners to craft the future direction of music in special education. One of the chapter's strengths is the listing of helpful resources, both in print and online, for further information about disabilities, special education, and music in special education.

Wilfried Gruhn, in "Music Learning in Early Childhood," takes the reader back to the very beginning—before the beginning, actually—of a human life, detailing the physical growth of the auditory system during the fetal gestation period, and outlining research on brain plasticity during the first days, weeks, months, and years of life. This chapter focuses mainly on recent neuromusical studies and encourages researchers to continue this approach in future work. Gruhn presents comparisons of brain research involving various animal species and brain research involving humans, to highlight unique human capabilities while demonstrating some similarities. Results of studies in both music and language, measuring brain activity in various cerebral regions, provide interesting insights and specific avenues for further study.

Conclusions

Overall, these two volumes exhibit several notable strengths. The authors have written quite effectively: thorough, but accessible, with great explanations, and not assuming too much or too little background knowledge from readers. The Handbook offers perspectives on music learning through a broad range of research lenses: theoretical, quantitative, qualitative, neuroscientific, behavioral, and historical. Many chapters examine a given research topic across multiple ages, development levels, and cultures. The book also encompasses formal and informal—and traditional and nontraditional—music learning.

The music education community will find The *MENC Handbook of Research on Music Learning* to be a key resource for quality music teaching and research. These volumes provide an essential source of current knowledge carefully crafted by leading experts in our field. The syntheses of study results, discussion of applications to teaching, and recommendations for further inquiry provide teachers and researchers with invaluable information and helpful guidance for future work.

About the Author

Nathan Buonviri is Assistant Professor of Music Education at Temple University in Philadelphia. Prior to his appointment, he taught instrumental music in high schools in Texas

and California. Nate has presented research and workshops at local, regional, national, and international conferences. His main research interest is aural skills pedagogy, with additional interests in percussion performance and pedagogy, and jazz pedagogy. He has published articles and reviews in *Percussive Notes*, *The Instrumentalist*, and *Music Educators Journal*. Nate is an active orchestral musician with Utah Festival Opera, and has performed with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Empire Brass, and Nell Carter. He recorded two CDs with the Dallas Wind Symphony, under the direction of Jerry Junkin and Frederick Fennell.